

Other, similar seminars for newly-elected parliamentarians were held in Africa recently, involving parliamentarians of a number of fledgling democracies. I am pleased to tell you also that AIPLF Parliamentary Affairs Committee Chairman Senator De Bané chaired most of these seminars. However, this is the first time we have had this kind of discussion and information seminar on parliamentary action in a democracy in the Americas.

The delegation I chaired consisted of three federal members — Raymond Bonin, Michel Daviault and Geoff Regan — and three members of provincial legislatures — Solange Charest of the Quebec National Assembly, Gilles Morin of the Ontario Legislative Assembly and Greg O'Donnell of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly.

The subjects discussed during the seminar were as follows: the separation of powers, which is the foundation of any democratic system; the relationship between Parliament and the executive, where Canadian parliamentarians stressed the concept of ministerial accountability; the role of the opposition in a parliamentary system, a topic that raised many questions from Haitian parliamentarians and fuelled a lengthy debate.

Canadian delegates pointed out that the presence of an opposition that was well organized and structured according to a well-defined set of rules was fundamental to the effective operation of a parliamentary democracy.

Other topics were the consideration of bills in the House and in committee, administrative structures and services essential to the effective functioning of Parliament, and the relationship between elected representatives and their constituents.

Canadian delegates were impressed by their Haitian colleagues' grasp of the subjects being discussed and by their very active participation in the exchanges that took up two full days. In fact, more than half of Haiti's two Houses of Parliament, about 70 members and senators, took part in these discussions, despite the fact that both Houses were sitting while we were there. The Speakers of both Houses also took an active part in the proceedings.

We found that Haitian parliamentarians were well informed. They are determined to work very hard to establish a strong parliamentary democracy in their country, despite the serious problems they are facing.

Honourable senators, if you have a chance to go to Haiti, I would urge you to take advantage of this opportunity, as we did, to meet and talk to parliamentarians.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

OBLIGATION TO PERFORM BY MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS— CONSEQUENCES OF DEMAND BY REFORM PARTY

Hon. Marcel Prud'homme: Honourable senators, on January 11, 1967 the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson tabled

a government motion to set up a joint committee on Canada's national and royal anthems.

I will forego the series of events that followed that historic date. As Senator Forrestall said yesterday, only two members of that committee still sit in Parliament. The other members of the Senate and of the House of Commons have left us. Senator Forrestall and I are the two MPs who were present at that historic moment, and we are now in the Senate. We recommended to the Parliament of Canada, that is, to the House of Commons and the Senate that "O Canada" be our national anthem.

Senator Forrestall and I fully agree. We both remember exactly the same thing: it was agreed that a national anthem, like a flag, like the monarchy, is a symbol that must be respected. Loyalty must be total, absolute and voluntary.

Like him, I sincerely regret that, for reasons of base political partisanship — and I underscore these words — and in the hope of embarrassing the official opposition, that is the Bloc Québécois in the House of Commons, the Reform Party committee asked the House committee that looks after procedural matters to kindly allow the members to sing "O Canada" every Wednesday. This, in my opinion, makes a total mockery of the symbol that should unite us.

Honourable senators, I object to this request. I have so informed the people concerned. They ignored it. I heartily regret that they politicized the national anthem for reasons of base partisanship, in the hope, perhaps, of embarrassing the members of a party by obliging them to sing, or not to sing, the national anthem, whereas in Quebec like everywhere else in Canada, spontaneously, at all major events where "O Canada" is sung, even those who do not have my federalist faith politely rise and sing, or at least rise. If we have to politicize our national anthem starting today, I predict that people will politicize it. I state publicly that the blame falls squarely on the members of the Reform Party who decided that, starting yesterday, they should sing the national anthem.

I must also congratulate — and do not take offense — Mr. Plamondon of the Bloc Québécois on his intelligent attitude. He said:

We will not rise to the bait. We will be polite. We will rise. If we are present, we will rise out of respect for those who wish to sing this fine song.

You see: "this fine song."

Honourable senators, I would like to remind you of a point of history. Perhaps I should congratulate the members of the Reform Party for wanting to honour the Quebec City Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, because "O Canada" was not